Israel Kamakawiwoʻole

Israel Kaʻanoʻi Kamakawiwoʻole (Hawaiian: pronounced [kəˌmɐkə ˌvivoˈʔole]), Hawaiian for 'the fearless eye, the bold face';[2] May 20, 1959 – June 26, 1997), also called **Bruddah Iz** or **IZ**, was a Native Hawaiian singer-lyricist, musician and Hawaiian sovereignty activist.

He achieved commercial success outside Hawaii when his album *Facing Future* was released in 1993. His medley of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World" was released on his albums *Ka ʻAnoʻi* and *Facing Future*. It was subsequently featured in several films, television programs and television commercials.

Along with his ukulele playing and incorporation of other genres, such as jazz and reggae, Kamakawiwoʻole remains influential in Hawaiian music.[3]

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Early life

Kamakawiwoʻole was born at Kuakini Medical Center in Honolulu to Henry "Hank" Kaleialoha Naniwa Kamakawiwoʻole Jr. and Evangeline "Angie" Leinani Kamakawiwoʻole. The notable Hawaiian musician Moe Keale was his uncle and a major musical influence. Kamakawiwoʻole was raised in the community of Kaimuki, where his parents had met and married.

Israel Kamakawiwoʻole

Kamakawiwoʻole in 1993

Background information	
Origin	Honolulu, Hawaii, United States
Genres	Hawaii · folk · world · reggae
Occupation(s)	Singer-songwriter
Instruments	Tenor ukulele[1] · vocals
Years active	1976–1997
Labels	Mountain Apple Company
Associated acts	Mākaha Sons
Born	Israel Kaʻanoʻi Kamakawiwoʻole May 20, 1959 Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii
Died	June 26, 1997 (aged 38) Honolulu, Hawaii, United States
Spouse(s)	Marlene Kamakawiwoʻole
Children	1 (Ceslie-Ann "Wehi")

He began playing music with his older brother Skippy and cousin Allen Thornton at the age of 11, being exposed to the music of Hawaiian entertainers of the time such as Peter Moon, Palani Vaughn and Don Ho, who frequented the establishment where Kamakawiwoʻole's parents worked. Hawaiian musician Del Beazley spoke of the first time he heard Kamakawiwoʻole perform, when, while playing for a graduation party, the whole room fell silent on hearing him sing.[4] He continued his path as his brother Skippy entered the Army in 1971 and his cousin Allen left in 1976 for the mainland.

In his early teens, he studied at Upward Bound (UB) of the University of Hawaii at Hilo and his family moved to Mākaha. There he met Louis Kauakahi, Sam Gray, and Jerome Koko.[5] Together with Skippy they formed the Makaha Sons of Niʻihau. A part of the Hawaiian Renaissance, the band's blend of contemporary and traditional styles gained in popularity as they toured their state and the continental United States, releasing fifteen successful albums. Kamakawiwoʻole's aim was to make music that stayed true to the typical sound of traditional Hawaiian music.

Music career

The Makaha Sons of Niʻihau recorded *No Kristo* in 1976 and released several more albums, including *Hoʻoluana*, *Kahea O Keale*, *Keala*, *Makaha Sons of Niʻihau* and *Mahalo Ke Akua*.

The group became Hawaii's most popular contemporary traditional group with breakout albums 1984's *Puana Hou Me Ke Aloha* and its follow-up, 1986's *Hoʻola*. Kamakawiwoʻole's last recorded album with the group was 1991's *Hoʻoluana*. It remains the group's top-selling CD. In 1982, Skippy died at age 28 of a heart attack[6] related to obesity. Later the same year, Kamakawiwoʻole married his childhood sweetheart Marlene. Soon after, they had a daughter whom they named Ceslieanne "Wehi" (born c. 1983).

In 1990, Kamakawiwoʻole released his first solo album *Ka ʻAnoʻi*, which won awards for Contemporary Album of the Year and Male Vocalist of the Year from the Hawaiʻi Academy of Recording Arts (HARA). *Facing Future* was released in 1993 by The Mountain Apple Company. It featured a version of his most popular song, the medley "Somewhere Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World" (listed as "Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World"), along with "Hawaiʻi 78", "White Sandy Beach of Hawaiʻi", "Maui Hawaiian Sup'pa Man", and "Kaulana Kawaihae". The decision to include a cover of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" was said to be a last-minute one by his producer Jon de Mello and Kamakawiwoʻole.[7] *Facing Future* debuted at No. 25 on *Billboard* magazine's Top Pop Catalogue chart. On October 26, 2005, *Facing Future* became Hawaiʻi's first certified platinum album, selling more than a million CDs in the United States, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.[8] On July 21, 2006, BBC Radio 1 announced that "Somewhere Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World (True Dreams)" would be released as a single in America.

In 1994, Kamakawiwoʻole was voted favorite entertainer of the year by the Hawaiʻi Academy of Recording Arts (HARA). *E Ala E* (1995) featured the political title song "ʻE Ala ʻE" and "Kaleohano", and *N Dis Life* (1996) featured "In This Life" and "Starting All Over Again".

In 1997, Kamakawiwoʻole was again honored by HARA at the Annual Nā Hōkū Hanohano awards for Male Vocalist of the Year, Favorite Entertainer of the Year, Album of the Year, and Island Contemporary Album of the Year. He watched the awards ceremony from a hospital room.

Alone in Iz World (2001) debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's World Chart and No. 135 on Billboard's Top 200, No. 13 on the Top Independent Albums Chart, and No. 15 on the Top Internet Album Sales charts.

Kamakawiwo'ole's *Facing Future* has become the best-selling Hawaiian album of all time.[4]

Support of Hawaiian rights

Kamakawiwoʻole was known for promoting Hawaiian rights and Hawaiian independence, both through his lyrics, which often stated the case for independence directly, and through his own actions.[9] For example, the lyric in his song "Hawaiʻi '78": "The life of this land is the life of the people/and that to care for the land (malama ʻāina) is to care for the Hawaiian culture", is a statement that many consider to summarize his Hawaiian ideals.[10] The state motto of Hawaiʻi is a recurring line in the song and encompasses the meaning of his message: "Ua Mau ke Ea o ka ʻĀina i ka Pono" (proclaimed by King Kamehameha III when Hawaiʻi regained sovereignty in 1843. It can be roughly translated as: "The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness").[11]

Kamakawiwoʻole used his music to promote awareness of his belief that a second-class status had been pushed onto fellow natives by the tourist industry.[12]

Later life

At some point in his later years, Kamakawiwoʻole converted to Christianity. In 1996, he was baptized at the Word of Life Christian Center in Honolulu and spoke publicly about his beliefs at the Na Hoku Hanohano Awards. He also recorded the song "Ke Alo O Iesu" (Hawaiian: *The Presence of Jesus*).[13]

Death

Kamakawiwoʻole suffered obesity throughout his life,[14] at one point weighing 757 pounds (343 kg; 54 st 1 lb) while standing 6 feet 2 inches (1.88 m) tall, representing a body mass index of 97.2.[6] He endured several hospitalizations because of health problems.[6] Beset with respiratory, heart, and other medical problems, he died at the age of 38 in Queen's Medical Center at 12:18 a.m. on June 26, 1997.[6] Kamakawiwoʻole was survived by his wife, Marlene Kamakawiwoʻole, and their daughter, Ceslie-Ann "Wehi".[15]

The Hawaiian flag flew at half-staff on July 10, 1997, the day of Kamakawiwoʻole's funeral. His koa wood coffin lay at the state capitol building in Honolulu, the third person (and the only non-government official) to be so honored. Approximately 10,000 people attended the funeral. Thousands of fans gathered as his ashes were scattered into the Pacific Ocean at Mākua Beach on July 12, 1997.[15] According to witnesses, many people on land commemorated him by honking their car and truck horns on all Hawaiian highways that day. Scenes from the funeral and scattering of Kamakawiwoʻole's ashes were featured in official music videos of "Over the Rainbow" released posthumously by Mountain Apple Company. As of May 2020, the two videos as featured on YouTube have collectively received over 950 million views.[16][17]

On September 20, 2003, hundreds paid tribute to Kamakawiwoʻole as a bronze bust (located at 21.45008°N 158.19092°W) of the revered singer was unveiled at the Waianae Neighborhood Community Center on Oʻahu. The singer's widow, Marlene Kamakawiwoʻole, and sculptor Jan-Michelle Sawyer were present for the dedication ceremony.[18]

Legacy

On December 6, 2010, NPR named Kamakawiwoʻole as "The Voice of Hawaii" in its 50 great voices series.[19]

On March 24, 2011, Kamakawiwoʻole was honored with the German national music award Echo. The music managers Wolfgang Boss and Jon de Mello accepted the trophy in his stead.[20]

A 2014 Pixar short film, *Lava*, features two volcanoes as the main characters. Kamakawiwoʻole's cover of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and his style of music was James Ford Murphy's partial inspiration for the short film.[21]

On May 20, 2020, Google Doodle published a page in celebration of Kamakawiwoʻole's 61st birthday. It featured information about his life, musical career, and impact on Hawaii. Included was a two-minute cartoon video with Kamakawiwoʻole's cover of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" playing as the background and imagery of Hawaii. The section of the page explaining the inspiration of the Doodle says that "The Doodle is full of places in Hawaiʻi that had special significance for Israel: the sunrise at Diamond Head, Mākaha Beach, the Palehua vista, the flowing lava and volcanic landscape of the Big Island, the black sand beach at Kalapana and the Waiʻanae coast."[22]

"Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World"

Kamakawiwoʻole's recording of "Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World" gained notice in 1999 when an excerpt was used in the TV commercials for eToys.com (later part of Toys "R" Us). The full song was featured in the movies *K-Pax*, *Meet Joe Black*, *Finding Forrester*, *Son of the Mask*, *50 First Dates*, *Fred Claus*, *Letters to Santa* and *IMAX: Hubble 3D*.[23] It was also featured in TV series *ER*, *Scrubs*, *Cold Case*, *Glee*, *South Pacific*, *Lost*, *Storm Chasers*, the UK original version of *Life on Mars*, and in Modern Family (TV series) among others.[24]

In 1988, a friend of Kamakawiwoʻole's called Milan Bertosa's Honolulu recording studio at 3:00 am and asked if Kamakawiwoʻole could come in to make a recording. Bertosa was in the process of shutting down for the night, but said he could come if he was able to get there in 15 minutes. In a 2011 interview, Bertosa said, "And in walks the largest human being I had seen in my life. Israel was probably like 500 pounds. And the first thing at hand is to find something for him to sit on." A security guard gave Kamakawiwoʻole a large steel chair. "Then I put up some microphones, do a quick sound check, roll tape, and the first thing he does is 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow.' He played and sang, one take, and it was over."[25]

"Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World" reached No. 12 on *Billboard*'s Hot Digital Tracks chart the week of January 31, 2004 (for the survey week ending January 18, 2004). It passed the 2 million paid downloads mark in the US by September 27, 2009, and then sold 3 million in the US as of October 2, 2011.[26] And as of October 2014, the song has sold over 4.2 million digital copies.[27] The song is the longest-leading number one hit on any of the *Billboard* song charts, having spent 185 on top of the World Digital Songs chart.[27]

On July 8, 2007, Kamakawiwoʻole debuted at No. 44 on the Billboard Top 200 Album Chart with "Wonderful World," selling 17,000 units.[28]

In April 2007, "Over the Rainbow" entered the UK charts at No. 68, and eventually climbed to No. 46, spending 10 weeks in the Top 100 over a two-year period.

In October 2010, following its use in a trailer for the TV channel VOX[29] and on a TV advertisement – for Axe deodorant (which is itself a revival of the advertisement originally aired in 2004)[30] – it hit No. 1 on the German singles chart, was the number one seller single of 2010[31] and was eventually certified 2× Platinum in 2011.[32]

As of November 1, 2010, "Over the Rainbow" peaked at No. 6 on the OE3 Austria charts, which largely reflect airplay on Austria's government-operated Top 40 radio network.[33] It also peaked at No.1 in France and Switzerland in late December 2010.

On October 24, 2016, *The Healer* premiered at the Heartland Film Festival in Indianapolis, which featured "Over the Rainbow".

Radio host George Noory uses "Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World" as bumper music on the overnight talk radio show *Coast to Coast AM*.

Discography

Studio albums

- *Ka ʻAnoʻi* (1990)
- *Facing Future* (1993)
- *E Ala E* (1995)
- *N Dis Life* (1996)

Compilation albums

- *Iz in Concert: The Man and His Music* (1998)
- *Alone in IZ World* (2001)
- *Wonderful World* (2007)
- *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*: The Best of Israel Kamakawiwo'ole (2011)

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External links

- Official website (https://www.izhawaii.com)
- Israel Kamakawiwoʻole (https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0436377/) on IMDb

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